

The BOWLING GREEN

(In the absence of Mr. Morley, Mr. Bennett's article has been substituted for the usual Bowling Green.)

Current Events

IN some educational institutions (they deserve that dreary appellation) there is a detestable practice of conducting courses in Current Events. The class subscribes to one of those periodicals that go in for concentrated information, such as *Time* or the *Literary Digest*. Then they try to excogitate answers to such questions as these:

What and where is Esthonia? How does it figure in the week's news? (If you had not taken this course you would have thought that Esthonia was a new kind of nervous malady, curable by osteopathy. And what harm would that have done you?)

Summarize the chief points in President Coolidge's address to the International Congregation of Girl Scouts.

Did they get any forrader at Geneva last week? Why not? What are the Nobel prizes? Who got them this year? For the last ten years?

What is the importance of the index number? What is it for the current week? (I may not have got this right. I mean the thing that Irving Fisher invented.)

What did Mussolini suppress last week?

And so on, and so on. All big pompous events, you see. Obvious subjects for editorials, themes for public speeches, the sort of thing you feel you ought to be interested in, but manifestly aren't, for they are all concerned with the imposing façade of life, with Movements and Tendencies and Public Figures and Policies and Critical Issues. But, thank Heaven! life is not so dull as that. And there is no reason why a course in current events should not be interesting, exciting, and even instructive. It all depends on what current events you select from the great mass provided by the daily papers and other sources.

Nowadays one is not allowed to make a criticism unless one is also "constructive." I find it hard to understand why, after cleaning one's face, one should also be required to superimpose a smile on it. However, I accept the challenge. If courses in current events must be given, then I know how they ought to be managed. And just to prove that I am in earnest I give an example of my method.

My first current event is from the *London Daily Telegraph* and is called Welsh Family's Escape.

Mr and Mrs —, of Duffryn-road, Alltwen, Pontardawe, and their ten children had a wonderful escape from death yesterday morning, when a huge boulder, estimated to weigh about ten tons, became dislodged and careered down the mountain side. After travelling about 150 yards down a steep surface and gaining great speed, it was diverted by a wall, and crashed into a bedroom of the — house, in which three of the children were sleeping, and strangely enough did not wake them, although the crash was heard by many persons in the neighborhood. Before the course of the boulder was checked it crashed through the bedroom, kitchen, scullery, and bathroom of the house. Most of the furniture in these rooms was smashed, but none of the twelve inmates was injured.

That is such a fantastically unreal episode that the mouth of the commentator is almost stopped. Think of having "no small bit of mountain" come crashing right through your house without injuring anyone! Where were all those twelve people when it struck? Were they all in the other bedroom, or were they drawn up stiffly against the walls to let the boulder through? Heaven only knows what queer Welsh *mores* we might not discover if we were to follow up such queries. But these are trivial questions compared to that other that we have all been longing to ask. How was it that while ten tons of rock hurtled through their room the children slept on? What would not the mothers (and fathers) of the world give to know what it is that Welsh parents give their children to make them sleep like that! The reporter lost a great opportunity there.

This single incident, you see, takes us right to the heart of the lives of the Welsh people. I defy my students not to be interested. A year from now you will find them absorbed in the Mabinogion.

We pass now to a piece of description which offers a pleasant contrast to that failure in reporting, for

it shows to what incredible heights the journalistic imagination can attain. Our source is *The Weekly Irish Times*.

The Rostrevor police have found at Killowen Point two large cases of eggs, packed in sectional cardboard receptacles. They were washed ashore from the s. s. Connemara, which was wrecked a fortnight ago. The contents of one case were found intact, while in the other box only a few eggs were broken. This contrasts strangely with the state of some of the bodies washed ashore, which were battered beyond recognition.

I do not think that in the whole range of journalism you will find anything to surpass the simple brutality of that statement. Yet a quite unintended brutality. I picture the unhappy reporter, desperately searching for news. He hears of, or discovers for himself, these cases of eggs. But eggs—eggs—two cases of eggs aren't news! Yet they are too good, metaphorically speaking, to be thrown away. How shall we make an "item" out of them? Pause for a few moments and imagine yourself confronted by that problem, and then I think you will find it hard to praise duly the brilliant originality of that transition—"This contrasts strangely with . . ."

My next current event happened in 1656, so it is not, strictly speaking, current; but since I read about it only yesterday, perhaps it may qualify. The scene is in Paris. The circumstances: the controversy between Jesuits and Jansenists on the subject of Divine Grace and human Freedom. The struggle was bitter. The Sorbonne was deeply involved. Then, from his retreat at Port Royal, Pascal suddenly threw confusion among the embattled theologians with his "Lettres Provinciales." Here is the effect (in part) of his first letter at the Sorbonne.

Le chancelier Séguier, à la lecture de la première lettre, faillit avoir une attaque, et dut être saigné sept fois. . . .

There's triumph for you! Could any review, however laudatory, bring you the same thrill of ecstasy as the knowledge that your book had made it necessary for your opponent to be bled seven times? Think if I had written an article attacking Materialism and I were to learn that some High Priest of Materialism, on reading it, had suffered the complete destruction of all his synapses, wouldn't I be happier than a scholar with an honorary degree?

Indeed, to be serious for a moment, I see here a hint for taking reviewing out of the realm of the impressionistic arts and making it a branch of the science of measurement. Why should not the review of the future simply record the reviewer's pulse, temperature, respiration, blood-pressure, opsonic index, lingual complexion, and so forth, before and after reading? Reviews would be much shorter and no less significant than they are today. Indignant authors would not besiege the correspondence columns with complaints, for after all if the reviewer was nauseated or if his temperature *did* drop to subnormal, these are objective facts, and the author has no "come-back." Publishers' puffs would be purely statistical. "The average increase of blood pressure of fifty-two selected readers of this book was 11.9." Last, but not least: when we used the word "reaction" we would mean what we said. "What sort of reaction did you get from the reviewers?" "Oh, pretty fair. Temperature averaged 99.8, but the thyroid coefficient was 'way off. I don't quite understand it."

My next is from *The London Observer*. It is headed

BURIED 100,000 PEOPLE. FUNERAL OF CEMETERY SUPER-INTENDENT.

The funeral took place yesterday of Mr. —, superintendent of — Cemetery, who died suddenly on Wednesday last. Deceased, who was seventy-five years of age, entered the employ of the London — Company at the age of thirteen, so that he had completed just over sixty-two years of service. For the past forty-one years he held the post of superintendent and during that period had conducted just over 100,000 funerals, and it is computed that prior to becoming superintendent he witnessed or assisted at at least 25,000 interments. During the war he was responsible for all the military funerals, nearly three thousand in all.

— Cemetery is the largest cemetery in the world. There are two railway stations inside the cemetery, complete with waiting rooms, refreshment rooms, and bars. There are also six churches inside the walls. Last year the staff held their Christmas dinner in one of the refreshment rooms.

After reading that to the class I would send them away to think over it. At the end of a week I would give them a two-hour examination. Four questions. Do not attempt more than one.

1. "Necropolis." A meditation in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne.

2. Shakespeare in modern dress. Scene: A bar in a cemetery. Enter two grave-diggers.
3. Elegy in a City Churchyard, by The Superintendent.
4. "Merry Christmas." Scenario of a play in the Russian manner. Scene: The Refreshment Room of a large cemetery. Time: Christmas night. The Staff of the cemetery are discovered at dinner.

So much for my students. For myself, I am moved to conjecture what sort of man this superintendent was who passed all his life in so dense an atmosphere of mortality. Was he prosperous, successful, and "bright," or did he sometimes have bad dreams? Did the spectacle of this interminable procession to the grave make him hard and stoical, or, since he could say, with more poignant realization than most, "Yesterday, today, and tomorrow we die," would it not have been natural for him to add, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry"? I prefer another picture. I see him as quite detached from the human significance of the daily holocaust. The professional manner of regard must have become a fixed habit with him. Mercifully enough. Mercifully for him, because how else could he have preserved his sanity? And for others, because *il faut mourir*, monsieur, and *someone* has to superintend these places. And, towards the end of his life, professional pride can hardly have failed to enter in. Sixty-two years of service! Saul hath slain his thousands; yes, but we are creeping up towards the 100,000 mark.

And then? Then a vision rises before me. I wish I could draw, I see it so clearly.

The scene is just outside the main gate of the cemetery. No one is about at this hour of the morning except an old woman who sits huddled up on a stool or box at the base of the cemetery wall, her head and shoulders covered with a shawl. She is knitting. She reminds you of *les tricoteuses* at the end of "A Tale of Two Cities." A funeral cortege approaches. The gates open for it. The old woman looks up for a moment, and, as she does so, you catch a glimpse of a gray bony face slashed by a malign charnel grin. No mistaking that grin! It is Death. As the hearse disappears through the gate the old woman croaks wheezily to herself,

"One hundred thousand . . . and one," and falls again to her knitting.

I could go on indefinitely. But I see a hand uplifted at the back of the room. Ah! It is the editor. "Please, sir," he is saying, "you've gone five minutes over the hour already."

Eh, bien, mes enfants, la séance est levée. (But I hope it is not to be *la dernière classe*!)

CHARLES A. BENNETT.

The recent death of Stuart Mason, the bibliographer of Oscar Wilde, seems to have coincided with a renewal of the familiar controversy between Lord Alfred Douglas and Frank Harris, in the details of which, not being entomologists, we are frankly not much concerned, except that it offers an item of legitimate trade interest. Rumors lately current that Douglas had obtained substantial damages from London booksellers who had sold copies of Harris's "Life of Wilde" seem to be confirmed by the following letter printed in the December 15 issue of the *London Times Literary Supplement*: "Sir,—Referring to the short notice in your last issue of the 'New Preface to the Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde,' will you allow me to say that in spite of Mr. Frank Harris's admission, contained in the preface, that practically every word he wrote about me in his 'Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde,' is false, and in spite of his expression of his desire to do me 'tardy justice' by what he describes as 'this frank confession,' his book, unamended and containing all his admitted libels on me, is still being sold by booksellers in London and elsewhere? A little more than two weeks ago I received from a leading bookseller in the West End of London a full apology, an undertaking not to sell the book again, and £200 in compensation for having sold one copy of it. Two other leading booksellers have apologized and undertaken not to sell the book in future and have offered monetary compensation. My object in asking you to give publicity to this letter is simply to give a warning to any booksellers who may happen to have copies of the book in their possession. My solicitors have instructions to proceed immediately against anyone who sells or attempts to sell the book.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
"ALFRED DOUGLAS."

An Impression of America, by Æ

I SEE as the boat comes into New York harbor a gigantic mass of heaven-assailing architecture. It breaks the skyline as huge cliffs might do. One's heart beats quicker, such is the sensation of immense power in the builders of those monstrous cliffs of concrete and steel that blaze in the evening light. Within the city the impression deepens. There is no end of this giant architecture. Forever new comrades rise up beside the elder giants, in new beautiful and wonderful lines. At Manhattan, where they are thickest, in the depths below the streets are darkened, and the eye grows dizzy looking up searching for a sky. It finds high in air great blocks of shadow and light out-soaring Doré or Martin, who piled up a fabulous architecture, temple beyond temple, in their imagination of Babylon or Nineveh. Here high up are spires of burnished copper, where churches have been built to crown some huge edifice. At night the highest lights seem hardly larger than stars, and one set there, without knowing where he was, might imagine the stars also were points of light continuing that aerial architecture up to infinity.

What will New York seem after another half century? Already it appears the most ancient of cities, because here alone does an actual architecture soar above the dreams imaginative artists have conceived of the Towers of Babel. One would imagine at night, where a remote light on a topmost story catches the eye, that some Chaldean wizard was there calculating horoscopes for Nebuchadnezzar. Chicago is hardly less impressive: a darker, fiercer, more tumultuous jumble of lofty buildings, and a surging humanity. City after city seems to be going their way, raising man-made cliffs from the flat American plains. Architecture is the great contemporary American art. The civilization is in that first stage where, as Flinders Petrie said in his "Revolutions of Civilization," there is a mastery over the plastic arts, because there is a physical vitality equal to any labor. The railway stations, even, are awe-inspiring. Entering the Grand Central or Pennsylvania stations, one almost feels the head should be bared and speech be in whispers, so like do they seem in their vastness to temples of the mysteries, but for the crowds which hurry about at their secular business. The material foundations of a mighty civilization are being laid everywhere.



What am I to say of the people? As I met them they overflowed with kindness. I find it difficult to imagine a kinder people. Haughty to those who do not like them, but lavish in their goodwill to all who meet them with unaffected liking. It is easy to like them. They are young in their minds. It is rarely one meets age in thought or emotion. But because there is youth in their nature one must not assume that their youth is not as competent as the age and experience of the ancestor continent. The evidence of competence lies everywhere about. They were no bunglers who built those great cities, whatever graft may have gone to their making. Their education at present tends to bring about a high average competence in the affairs of life rather than a profound subjectivity. They look outwards rather than inward. The activity is so tremendous that people are called away from central depths to surfaces. There they achieve marvellous things and are delighted as children at what they do. They are a little doubtful about it also. They ask you what you think, and listen to see whether you have an intuition of anything better still which is to come out of them. They are continually scrapping works and buildings, because out of some inner fountain in their being there are welling up perpetually new images which mirror better the secret of their own character.

They are evolving a beauty and elegance of their own. The women have almost standardized good taste in dress. It is rare to see a woman who offends the artist's sense in color and form. I wish I could commend the art with which so many redden their lips with fierce color. Even lovely girls yield to this hideous fashion. It is the mass mood of youth for the moment. It will probably vanish in another year or two. The girls are so naturally charming that they do not need the arts of the demi-mondaine, who must conceal the withering of her freshness. They almost all have an intellectual eagerness. It

yet remains to be seen what this eagerness of American women for ideas tends to, what discovery for themselves or for life. I feel at present their eagerness is like bubbles under water, trying to rise, to come to their own natural air. So they may move to the creation of a new feminine type, perhaps hermaphrodite psychically, fusing the intellectual and the emotional. The American man is less effervescent but, I think, with strong elements of romanticism and idealism, even in those powerful masters of industry. All are lavishly generous. They have discovered the economic applications of that spiritual law which gives to the giver: so that whoever pours out to others what is in them to give, whatever there is of love or beauty or imagination or intellect, are themselves perpetually being fed from within. In the sphere of economics this lavish spending of what is earned stimulates consumption and reacts on production. The spendthrift nation is the prosperous nation. While one notices with delight this instinctive lavishing of what is earned, a doubt arises, whether the natural resources of the country are not being too lavishly squandered also. It is right to spend what one earns. But is it right to mine the lands, as too many farmers do, taking from the earth



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its stored-up fertility and restoring nothing to it, cutting down the forests, draining the oil wells, and in a thousand other ways leaving to their children an inheritance of nature somewhat exhausted, as a woman by too much child-bearing?

People speak too often of America as an extension of European civilization and culture. In the superficial sense this is true as it is true that every child must have some parents. But just as the child develops a distinct character so is this new race developing a powerful character of its own. What mood is going to be fundamental there? I am for the moment a Spenglerian trying to discover a central spirit. It is easy for Spengler brooding over European, Arabic, Greek, Egyptian, Indian, or Chinese culture, all either dead or past their zenith, to discover the spirit which locks them in a unity. But here is the beginning of a civilization where what is to dominate and inspire is yet unmanifested or is noticeable in but a few minds. Great cultures spring like great religions from founders with but few disciples, and at first the ideas which later may dominate are born in a society where an opposing idea is king. Then begins a struggle like that between the beings spoken of by Heraclitus. "One lives the other's death. One dies the other's life." What is arising or to arise in the States? I think of it as some mood of planetary consciousness. I cannot get a more precise word. Intuition and reason alike prompt me to say this. In the ancient world where travel was difficult, dangerous, and expensive, the material basis for such a planetary consciousness was not in existence. The cultures of China, India, Egypt turned inward and brooded on themselves. Within the last century only has a nervous system interlocking the planet been evolved. Railway, steamship, cable, wireless, swift-evolving air transport, economic international organizations: the roar of the planet is in every ear. It is true it sounds in

European ears also, but it is not the planet they were born under. The characters of European and Asiatic were formed in elder centuries, and they change but little from their intense self-concentration in the new era.

Biologically, the people are made up from fiery particles of life jetted from many human fountains. The biological ancestors of the people in the States are European, Asiatic, African, with some survival of the aboriginal American. Nature will find in this multitude the materials to blend to make a more complex mentality than any known before with wide-reaching affinities in the subconscious. I notice, too, that the writers who form the spiritual germ-cell of American culture—Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and their school—think and write of themselves almost as naturally as being children of earth, as of being American citizens. That group manifest in their writings something like a cosmic consciousness. American statesmen, too, are beginning to formulate world policies, league of nations, world peace, a sense of duty to the world struggling up through the intense self-interest and pre-occupation with their own affairs. The American benevolence is world-wide. The Rockefeller Foundation is as benevolent to Japan, France, England, Germany, Belgium, or Singapore as to neighboring Canada. It thinks of the health of humanity, not merely of the American people. I do not say this planetary outlook or consciousness is universal. It exists rather in a few minds. The ordinary man may not understand, indeed he is first repelled by the thoughts that move the mightier of his kind, but the same elements are in his being, and finally he reels after the shepherds who call. A planetary consciousness I surmise will grow up through centuries in this astonishing people, warring with its contrary idea which also has its own meaning and just basis. Our human faculties are burnished by their struggle with opposites in ourselves. And it is no less true of the ideas which become dominant in great civilizations. I imagine centuries in which in the higher minds in the States a noble sense of world duty, a world consciousness, will struggle with mass mentality and gradually pervade it, to establish there, and in the world, perhaps, the idea that all humanity are children of one King, or at least to make so noble an idea part of the heritage of those who come after, until, finally, as it must in the ages, it becomes the dominant idea in world consciousness.

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Æ needs no introduction to Americans. Even before his recent visit to this country he was widely known, first as assistant to Horace Plunkett in the latter's economic and agricultural revival of Ireland, and later as himself the head and front of the movement for Irish nationalism. Editor, poet, painter, mystic, as well as publicist and economist, he furnished George Moore with the subject for a remarkable chapter in his "Hail and Farewell," being the only celebrity to be handled with kindness in those books. The initials Æ by which George Russell has been generally known resulted not from selection but from a printer's error. Russell, so the story runs, wrote for a philosophical Review some articles on Indian philosophy which he signed Æon. The printer, unable to decipher more than the first two letters of the superscription, used the Æ alone and so established the signature. It will be welcome news to Americans to learn that Æ is to return to the United States for a brief visit this month.

A collected edition of the poems of George Russell is published by the Macmillan Company who also issue his works in belles lettres and politics. Among the latter may be mentioned "Literary Ideals in Ireland," "Irish Essays," "Imaginations and Reveries," "Coöperation and Nationality," etc.

By the death on May 16 of Sir Edmund Gosse England lost one of the most urbane and scholarly of its critics, a writer the greater part of whose work was in the field of belles lettres but whose enduring claim to fame rests upon a single masterpiece. "Father and Son," which he published in 1909, and which is an unsparing piece of realism pillorying Victorian ways and ideals, was crowned by the French Academy, and was generally recognized as a work of the first order.